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TAGS: [EAID](#) [ELTN](#) [PGOV](#) [MASS](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: RENEWED PROMISE TO BEGIN OPERATIONS ON TAJIK-AFGHAN BRIDGE

CLASSIFIED BY: Tom Hushek, Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy
Dushanbe, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b)

11. (C) Summary: Since the August 26 ceremonial opening of the U.S.-built Tajik-Afghan bridge, Tajik security authorities have blocked opening the bridge for operations. Recent interventions by the Embassy appear to have led to a new compromise among Tajik government agencies which will allow a limited stream of truck traffic across the bridge. The Embassy will continue to follow up to ensure trucks do actually start moving across the bridge. End summary.

12. (C) Background: At the time of the opening ceremony, Tajik authorities promised us the bridge would be open to traffic -- up to 50 vehicles per day -- the day after the ribbon-cutting. In fact, Tajik security officials have hindered efforts to begin even limited operations. Instead, truck traffic across the border from Sher Khan Bandar, Afghanistan to Nizhniy Pyanj, Tajikistan continues via the barge just downstream from the new bridge. The Japanese Embassy in Tajikistan has complained to the government that the bridge closure has seriously hampered delivery Pakistani cement intended for the Japanese construction project rebuilding the Tajik highway feeding into the bridge. Despite public statements from President Rahmon and other Tajik officials on the importance of the bridge and related road projects, the State Committee on National Security has effectively vetoed bridge traffic.

13. (C) Recent interventions from the Embassy seem to have escalated the level of discussion within the Tajik government on this issue. The Ambassador spoke with First Deputy Foreign Minister Yuldashev and the Deputy Chief of Mission followed up with discussions with Deputy Foreign Minister Kasimov directly challenging the wisdom of letting the bridge remain idle. Post has communicated our intention to bring an assessment team from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection service to review bridge operations in mid November with an eye toward recommending additional assistance. We have consistently stressed the need for all Tajik government agencies -- in particular the Border Guards, who are subordinate to the State Committee on National Security, and Customs -- to work together and cooperate directly with their Afghan counterparts to establish operating procedures for the bridge. Some early momentum prior to the ribbon-cutting dissipated soon after.

¶4. (C) Following our interventions last week, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs invited Deputy Chair of the State Committee on National Security, General Gaffarov, to the Ministry to discuss obstacles to opening the bridge. The Ministry called in Deputy Chief of Mission October 18 to discuss the results of the meeting with Gaffarov. While the security services continue to be concerned about truck traffic from Afghanistan, they have reportedly agreed to begin limited traffic across the bridge. In particular, they will allow trucks carrying Pakistani cement being imported for the Japanese road construction project. These will be the first commercial vehicles allowed to cross the bridge.

¶5. (C) The Embassy will continue to monitor the situation and watch whether this traffic is initiated. Already, post's Regional Security Officer has heard from Tajik security contacts established at the time of the ribbon-cutting, that preparations are under way to "open" the bridge. EmbOffs will travel to the bridge October 20 to observe first hand.

¶6. (C) Comment: Fewer and fewer Tajik officials seem willing to challenge the State Committee on National Security. Since the Border Guards were subordinated to the State Committee in a government reorganization last December, cooperation on some of our key border assistance programs has diminished sharply. We were pleased that our constant urging on this issue of initiating bridge operations, backed by common sense and continued public statements by President Rahmon about the importance of the bridge, seem to have given the Foreign Ministry enough backbone to call in General Gaffarov and obtain this concession. It's just a start, but one that will allow the Tajik and Afghan border guards and customs officials to work out operating procedures.

JACOBSON